Thoughts on European Cultural Networks, 1992 - 2016
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Thanks so much to Katherine Heid and Culture Action Europe for inviting me (and all of you) to look back and forward on the evolution of the cultural networks. I would have loved to be with you all today!

But here are a few thoughts that might be interesting, or amusing, or illuminating… and although I don't know who will be participating at the meeting today, I do know that Carla Delfos will be there and she certainly shares these memories (and more!)

Re-reading the publication, "Network Solutions for Cultural Cooperation in Europe", I was transported back to those heady days when we felt we were involved in a 'movement', something new, something that thinkers and researchers were just starting to write about. (Indeed, when I tried to prepare for my job interview with IETM in the summer of 1994, I didn't find any words at all about 'networks' or 'networking' in management books.)

I recall sitting around a big table (maybe at Les Halles de Schaerbeek?) with all the EFAH members that were cultural networks (and in those days, that was almost all the EFAH members), actually writing that, hands-on, together with Judith. EFAH was like that, and most of the other networks too - the members DID the work. If there was a meeting with a civil servant or politician, the members went. If there was a paper to write, the members wrote it. At network meetings, the members helped at the registration desk, took the membership money, passed out the network newsletter (that members had helped to write)… and so on. We were few networks, in 1995 we counted 40 and that was almost 15 years after IETM was founded.

It was EXCITING to be part of this movement: we were pioneers! We were 'being European', amongst the first to feel we were doing so. After the Wall came down, we were eager to include our Eastern European friends and colleagues. For IETM meetings, we would easily have 100-120 applications from Central and Eastern Europe colleagues for travel bursaries. And what's more surprising, we would get 60-80 travel bursaries to give out! They came from the Council of Europe, always, and the first staunch believer in the networks, but also from the cultural institutes and national ministries. Yes, the British Council, French Institute and so on would actually give us thousands of euros (ecu's they were called!) to give out in travel grants. Those were the days!

We were proud to be 'different' (and this is clear in Judith's report): we firmly distanced ourselves from associations or project consortia. Networks, we claimed, were non-hierarchical, dynamic, emergent structures, unpredictable, somehow anarchic and democratic at the same time. Horizontal, and with no 'centre', anyone in the network could take a decision on behalf of the whole network (and believe me, it was sometimes hard to manage that!)

We were proud to have been self-generated from the bottom-up, by the will of our members, and we had a natural distrust for any so-called 'networks' that had been formed by institutions or by suddenly getting a big grant.

We were 'learning organisations', learning how to be European, to be international, to be collaborative across the enormous range of cultural differences we identified, the East/West and North/South divide being among them. Learning how to work together, to trust one another enough to make a project together.

In the 1980's the networks started to emerge and to call themselves 'networks' in opposition to the existing, heavy state institutions for cultural exchange.   In the 1990's, the networks struggled for official recognition.

'Network Solutions' cites three main obstacles - some of which are still recognisable today. I would add a fourth:

1. Structural support and stability   This was a big one: secretariat staff - if there indeed were any - often went on unemployment benefit in the summer or just weren't paid for a few months, as EU (and national) grants for the year, if you even got one, came as late as November for the current year. There was simply no cash flow. Another problem was that accountants would not let us write off unpaid membership fees, so our balance sheets looked great, with all those years of past fees supposedly coming…But we all knew they'd never arrive. If we were lucky enough to get project grants, they'd come after the project was finished, with no little bit upfront. (Hence the idea of the Guarantee Fund that you see in the paper - an idea promoted by Claude Veron). Some of us even looked to try and find, or invent, a different kind of legal statute, one that did not follow the hierarchical model of an association yet still would guarantee the public accountability needed for receiving public money. And any discussion of job descriptions or wage scales for network coordinators was years away.

2. Membership fees and contributions : Maybe also as now, there was a serious problem of non-paying members - and how could the secretariats chase them when we knew everyone was broke!?! In those days, the EC accepted in-kind support as a part of the match for an EC grant, and thus there was a lot of very imaginatively costed in-kind support - I remember trying to cost out all the travel that IETM members and boards contributed when they came to IETM meetings…

3. Lack of understanding : How many of you remember that a certain high-level person in the Culture DG used to go around to conferences telling his favourite joke,'Networking means NOT-working; indeed we were seen by several national governments as unwelcome mediators asking for funding that should go to artists. And trying to convince them that we were useful would only result in the question, "Well, OK, what do you do for '*our*' artists?" We also had the extra work of somehow 'proving' the outcomes networking even though we kept telling everyone this was impossible due to the nature of our 'emerging structures and dynamic natures'.

4. And as time went on, I would add another struggle - and that is the gradual change of the cultural institutes from financial supporters to competitors for funding from the same pots, something that has become more and more clear as foundations too now compete for funds for their own projects. As we were representing the independent sector, we felt these grants were for us, not government institutions or funders; we felt betrayed.

I have not taken the time to go through ALL of the old documents on my computer, but here are a few key moments and the advocacy documents that are testimonies to our struggles. And if you think that is an odd word to use, let me recount a phone conversation   with Anne Van Otterloo, founded of De Bundling (youth theatre network), later transformed into EU Net

Art (art for children and young people), which transformed into….well…that's another story! One day Anne called me, very depressed and asks me, 'But Mary Ann how many times do we have to say the same things to these EU people?'. I thought about it and replied, 'Forever Anne, because the minute they even start to understand, they change jobs or there are EP elections…'. Yes, it felt like a struggle. And for a short time, the non-funding of the cultural networks was used by the European Parliament to criticise the Commission, which made the Commission really angry with us…we were a political football until we realised what was happening.

A few key moments
From 1991 - 1994, IETM researched and published three guides to EU funding programmes that had the potential to fund cultural projects: Info Box / Bread and Circuses / More Bread and Circuses. There was no other such publication. The CCPs didn't exit yet!

It must have been around 1995 or 1996 the EFAH discovered a little known grant, called an A Line, that was intended to fund running costs of NGOs that 'did the work that normally the Commission should do'. At that time, only one cultural organisation got it: EFA the European Council of Artists. EFAH published the possibility and urged all its members to apply. (EFA was not amused). This was important because the rules of Kaleidoscope, the culture programme, were strict: you could not ask for (project) funding after you'd had it for 3 years in a row. So those networks that had had project support for the previous three years were left with a dilemma - and we applied for these new A Lines, directly from the European Parliament and not from the Culture DG (who was furious and thought we were being disloyal).

In 1996, Manuel Castells published, *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), the first part of his trilogy *The Information Age*. An important step for us as it legitimised our work!

Since 1996, some of the networks worked on evaluation criteria. IETM (together with Odile Chenal, at the European Cultural Foundation) worked up a discussion paper for an EFAH meeting of the networks. Elements of this were revisited over the years, in 2001, all the networks collaborated on a paper edited by IETM, aptly entitled 'Evaluation Criteria for Cultural Networks', given to the European Parliament and the Commission.

In 1997, due to our urging and the Dutch culture ministry's interest, they organised a conference, 'Between Two Stools', as part of the Dutch EU Presidency. The aim was to bring the other EU Member States together to find a way to jointly support cultural networks. The Dutch Culture Ministry surveyed the other member states and found out… that several of them, especially German and Danish, did not even want us to exist…

In 1998, IETM invited Fondazione Fitzcarraldo (network-friendly since the start) to make a first-ever, serious research study of the effects of cultural networking based on a European cultural network. The research was published in 2000, in English ("How Networking Works") and in French (Les Réseaux Raisonnés") by the Finnish Arts Council. It was hoped that other cultural networks would be inspired to undertake similar studies thus adding to the general knowledge pool on cultural networking.

In 2001, the Culture DG, under Director General Nikolaus Van der Pas, announced the first ever Culture Forum. Van der Pas had invited me to see him, which was quite a 'first' and he challenged me to find a list of people that everyone in the culture sector would approve. He, like others in DGX before him, claimed that we were too fragmented and competitive to ever work together as a sector. ELIA, IETM, EFAH and the City of Helsinki together wrote

a proposal for he Forum, with a format, a list of non-controversial speakers, well, the whole thing. Although we were too late to change the plans of the Forum; a while later when the DG put together a 'Groupe des Sages', most of the names on it were on our list!

From 2006- 2008, the Fondazione Fitzcarraldo organised a series of meeting (the International Workshop for Foundations and Networks) between foundation and networks, in Rio de Janeiro, in Torino and in Lisbon, with the support of the Banco San Paolo Foundation and the Gulbenkian Foundation especially. Thirty-three representative of cultural networks and grant-giving foundations from all over the world discussed the obstacles facing foundation to try to fund networks…it was the usual story - how to evaluate us. What are the clearly defined, prove-able outcomes?

2011, The Triangle network (for visual artists) was held in London, with three days of discussions around network sustainability.

Well, there are too many stories, too many papers, too many meetings to recount.   But maybe this gives a flavour. And to end, here are just three of the many many many many citations we have used to defend our worth!

"The core business (of networks) is not the manufacture of products or the provision of services, but **social learning, communication and the making of meaning**." By far, the most added value comes from learning together and advocacy. *(Engel, 1993)*

"... international networks ....provide the **rudimentary infrastructure of international cultural cooperation** and their value could be measured by their inclusiveness and capacity to **spin off new subnetworks and project consortia**."

Dragan Klaic, 2007 opening speech to the International Workshop for Foundations + Networks

"The culture of the networked society is a culture of protocols of communication between all cultures in the world, developed on the basis of the common belief in the power of networking and of the synergy obtained by giving to others and receiving from others."

Manuell Castells, Communication Power, 2013